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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA.

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THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, BOARD OF EDUCATION TRACES THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN BERKELEY. HE DESCRIBES THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNITY, THE PROCEDURE FOR SCHOOL FUNDING, AND THE CHANGE IN MAKEUP OF THE BOARD FROM "CONSERVATIVE" TO "LIBERAL." UNDER THE AEGIS OF A MORE PROGRESSIVE BOARD, PERSONNEL PRACTICES WERE GREATLY IMPROVED, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL PROBLEMS WAS ENCOURAGED, AND SCHOOL BUDGETS WERE INCREASED. A CITIZEN'S COMMITTEE WAS APPOINTED TO STUDY THE PROBLEM OF DE FACTO SEGREGATION AND TO MAKE SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITS ELIMINATION. FERMENT FOLLOWED THE BOARD'S PROPOSALS TO BEGIN DESEGREGATION ON THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL, AND IN 1964 OPPOSITION GROUPS DEMANDED A RECALL ELECTION TO REMOVE THE BOARD. THE RESULT OF THE ELECTION WAS IN FAVOR OF THE INCUMBENTS, AND THIS VOTE OF CONFIDENCE MARKED THE TURNING POINT IN BERKELEY'S MOVEMENT TOWARD INTEGRATED SCHOOLS AND QUALITY EDUCATION. IN 1964 A NEW SUPERINTENDENT AND CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF WHO ARE COMMITTED TO DESEGREGATING THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS BY SEPTEMBER 1968 TOOK OVER. BERKELEY'S EXPERIENCE SHOWS THAT THE BEST APPROACH TO INTERRACIAL EDUCATION IS TO FORCE THE COMMUNITY TO RECOGNIZE AND DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN AND IDENTIFICATION WITH PROBLEMS OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION ARE BASIC TO A SEARCH FOR A VIABLE SOLUTION. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA'S CITIES, SPONSORED BY THE U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS, WASHINGTON, D.C., NOVEMBER 16-18, 1967. (NH)

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

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for the
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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It must be apparent by the year 1967 that school desegregation in the United States requires more than court decisions, Federal monetary inducements, demonstrations, magazine articles, and parlor discussions. The effective decisions must be made by local school boards, and in any particular community the effective means are those which result in the school board taking the appropriate action.

In other words, the problem cannot be solved by applying one particular formula or by following the approach which was used successfully in some other community. Rather, given the independence which each community in our country enjoys over school matters, what

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is needed is a surge of local leadership which pushes and pulls the school administration, reluctant or timid school board members, and the community in the right direction.

Perhaps it is not too far-fetched an analogy to think of fighting one's way through an uncharted swamp filled with tangled growth. You must explore to find where paths can be opened up, and back away from those areas which are impenetrable until you ultimately work your way through. In such a situation the particular path you are taking is not as important as the direction in which you are facing and the fact that you are making some progress.

With that preliminary observation, we can take a look at what has been happening in Berkeley during the last few years, not as a blueprint for action elsewhere, but rather as evidence that dedication and hard work <u>can</u> change City Hall.

Actually, in an absolute sense, Berkeley has not accomplished very much. Compared to most other communities, it is a bit ahead, but more in the sense of identifying its problems than of having found sure answers and clear-cut solutions. Nevertheless, Berkeley is worth examining, because what happened there can be encouraging to those who might feel the odds are insurmountable in their own communities.

Berkeley is a city of around 100,000 regular residents plus about 27,500 college students. It is located across the Bay from San Francisco and is a part of a physically continuous commercial, industrial and residential area of well over a million

population. It is noted around the world as the seat of the University of California, and around the country, in addition, for its militant student activists. What most people don't realize is that Berkeley is a microcosm of the United States -- not in the sense that it precisely and proportionately represents the whole country, but in the sense that within its city limits it has a substantial portion of almost every ingredient in that social and economic stew which constitutes our nation. It has some very poor people and some very wealthy ones, with a predominance of upper middle income earners. It has flat land, with relatively inexpensive housing and families living on low income or welfare, and hills rising almost to two thousand feet and covered with beautiful, expensive homes. The University is its biggest payroll -- about one hundred million dollars per year -- but it also has some light industry. The intellectual flavor provided by the University faculty is supplemented by a substantial number of successful professional and business people with a real capacity for leadership, which they exercise during the day in San Francisco, Oakland, and the industrial cities of Richmond and Emeryville.

Berkeley has many active political liberals, as well as dedicated conservatives, and one of the strongest John Birch Society chapters in Northern California. The one local daily newspaper has long reflected a conservative philosophy in its editorial policy and news columns. There are enough labor union members to make labor a

significant element in community politics.

About 40% of the school population is Negro (compared with 5% in 1940), and another 10% is made up of other identifiable minority groups (most Oriental, with some Mexican-American).

For many years there was a very decided cleavage in Berkeley, pretty much along town and gown lines. The University tended to be withdrawn and isolated, and the city government (including the school system) was pretty much dominated by what often is referred to as the Shattuck Avenue group (Shattuck Avenue is the main commercial district of the city).

To illustrate the basic orientation that prevailed in Berkeley for many years and how it began to shift, let me relate a series of events which began in 1956. The California State Constitution places a maximum on the tax rate which a local school board may levy to raise money for operating expenses. It can be increased only by vote of the citizens in the school district, by a specific proposal on the ballot. The maximum then was two dollars per one hundred dollars assessed evaluation. The Berkeley school district for many years had been operating on a basis which gave a high priority to holding down the cost of education. The teachers were unhappy because their salaries were significantly below that of other districts in the area, but the Board of Education and the Superintendent said they were helpless; they had no money and couldn't increase the tax rate. More to the point, the Board refused to place a tax increase proposal on the ballot.

Teachers and supporting parents were able, by initiative petition, to get a proposal to increase the school tax rates by fifty cents on the ballot in the 1956 election. Notwithstanding the opposition of the School Board and the Superintendent, the tax increase was approved by the voters. The organization which had been forged in support of this proposal -- perhaps just because of Parkinson's law, but more probably from higher motivation -- decided it was going on, to change the Board of Education. The next time there was a Board election (Board members in Berkeley and most of California are elected by direct vote), they pulled a tremendous upset, unseating the one member who was up for re-election by almost a two to one vote. The man who defeated him, Dr. Paul Sanazaro, in the opinion of Berkeley liberals, has no superior as a Board Member anywhere in the country. He had led his class both as an undergraduate and as a Medical School student at the University of California, was a top faculty man at the Medical School, and possessed a keen, brilliant, analytical mind and the ability to articulate profound matters in clear language. He was able to focus the attention of the community on issues in such a way that there was tremendous stimulation to the community to do more.

In successive elections, over a period of several years, there was an almost complete change in the complexion of the Board. The change was reflected in many different ways: for example, the emphasis was shifted from how little could be spent on schools to

how much represented a good investment for society and its future citizens. The approach on teachers' salaries was not in terms of how low an increase could be negotiated, but how rapidly the Board could move to having the most attractive salary schedule in the area. Teachers were encouraged to join teachers' organizations, and assurance was given that every employee organization (teachers and otherwise) would be given immediate recognition by the Board, and would have representation on the advisory committee which formulated the budget. The old policy rested on deliberately having a high teacher turnover--by hiring graduate students' wives, knowing that a good percentage of them would move away when their husbands got their degrees, making way for more beginning teachers, and thus keeping a high proportion of teachers in a low salary bracket. This policy was reversed in favor of trying to hire good teachers who would make a career of teaching in Berkeley. "Pay-to-stay" was one of the slogans coined to support higher salaries.

In 1958 a citizens' committee was appointed to study the problems of education in a multi-racial school system. The next year the committee submitted a report which would be regarded as quite passe in 1967, but in 1959 it was rather startling. Just about all of that committee's recommendations were formally adopted by the Board within a few months. One of them inaugurated an intergroup training project for teachers. It was entirely voluntary, but teachers participated with a very high degree of interest. Funds were made avail-

able by a private foundation to provide leadership for this project.

The attitude on teacher freedom also changed rather drastically. In the early 1950's, one of the biggest controversies ever to hit Berkeley arose over whether Paul Robeson should be permitted to sing at the Community Theatre, which was under the jurisdiction of the school district. By a 3 to 2 vote of the School Board--and that School Board was predominantly conservative by any standard--Robeson was allowed to sing. Three members felt that the political views of an accomplished singer were no proper basis for denying him permission to sing--a decision, incidentally, clearly required by the law. In the bitter aftermath of that decision those three board members were all replaced on the Board. One of them, who happened to be the treasurer of the local Republican Club, was opposed by a former University of California all-American football player, whose campaign workers urged the voters to "Replace an un-American with an all-American".

This attitude, that the children had to be protected from contamination by dangerous ideas, was completely reversed during the early 60's. Great emphasis was put on teacher freedom, not solely in the sense of defending teachers' rights but also in terms of the positive value of exposing youngsters to all points of view and teaching them to evaluate ideas for their intrinsic value. In the words of Dr. Clark Kerr, who was then President of the University of California, the purpose of education was not to make ideas safe for students, but to make students safe for ideas.

In 1960, a non-discriminatory policy of hiring, placing, and promoting teachers was adopted, after public acknowledgment that the prior Board and Superintendent had "secretly" been following a policy of placing Negro teachers only in schools with a substantial Negro enrollment. Not surprisingly, the schools in the flatlands of Berkeley were predominantly Negro, while the hill area schools were almost entirely white. For many years, teachers associated the hill schools with prestige, and often referred to the flatlands as the "Siberia" to which troublemakers were likely to be transferred.

But in the early 1960's, a growing awareness that the toughest problems in education related to <u>de facto</u> segregation, coupled with the concern of the Board and the Superintendent for interracial problems, led to a desire on the part of many of the more able teachers to work in the flatlands. Many of the experiments and innovations (such as elementary algebra in the third and fourth grades, and--would you believe--physics in the first grade), were created by teams in the flatlands; and some of the hill-dwelling parents began to grumble that <u>theirs</u> were the educationally deprived children.

The community saw that dedicated teachers, eager and encouraged to work on problems, were an essential part of the solution.

Then, during this hectic period, in addition to the election of School Board members every two years, there were seven school tax elections in 3 1/2 years (1959-1962). Two of these involved an

increase in the tax rate for current operations; the first one failed, the second passed. The other five were intended to fund a ten million dollar bond issue for urgently needed school buildings. The California Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the electorate for a school bond issue. Four times there was frustrating failure, with the "yes" vote running 66 1/3%, 61.5%, 66% and 65.5%. On the fifth try, the vote was 67% -- very little difference, except that it was the difference between winning and losing.

All of these tax elections -- one every six months for 3½ years -- generated a lot of interest and embroiled the community in much controversy, because in every election the opposition challenged the philosophy and program of the school district, as well as the quality and patriotism of its teachers. The elections played a significant role in the evolution of Berkeley's approach to interracial problems, because of the total community involvement. They involved a high degree of participation by parents of school children -- particularly the mothers, who kept physically fit as well as intellectually stimulated by ringing doorbells endlessly. (Throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, many people who disapprove of what has been happening in Berkeley ruefully say, "Protect me from those marching mothers in Berkeley".)

The Board also believed in involving citizens directly in the effort to identify school problems and search for solutions. It appointed a citizens' committee to prepare a statement on educational policy for the district. Perhaps any educator could write a

pretty good statement of educational policy on equal opportunity in a day, and any good Board member could do so in a few days. It took a citizens' committee about a year and a half in Berkeley. The Board knew this would happen, because it had appointed a committee truly representative of the divergent views in the city. There was bound to be a lot of intellectual friction. But in the process many views were modified, and respect was generated not only for people of different views but, in addition, for the processes by which policy was formulated. This approach required a deep faith in democracy, and happily it was justified, because that citizen's committee proposed a good draft of an educational policy statement. It was reviewed by a staff committee and was revised by the Board before adoption but it represented a tremendously good expression from the grass roots of the community.

In late 1962 the Board appointed another citizens' committee to study the problems of de facto school segregation in Berkeley. This committee submitted its report in November of 1963, and the next ten months in Berkeley can be described only as total ferment. The committee agreed unanimously that de facto segregation was disadvantageous to education, and was pretty close to unanimous on its specific recommendations.

The local newspaper agreed to print the lengthy report in full and, in addition, 15,000 copies wereprinted for separate distribution throughout the city. They were placed in all the schools,

distributed to all the PTA units, set out in all the public libraries, and so on. All of the PTA's studied the matter and held extensive meetings. Ad hoc groups began to organize to study the report or to attack one side or the other. The Board's first public hearing on the report was attended by 1,200 citizens, the second by over 2,000.

The Board decided to concentrate initially at the junior high school level. Berkeley had three junior high schools. Garfield Junior High School in north Berkeley was almost entirely Caucasian, an elite status school. In national achievement tests, over half the Garfield students ranked in the 96th percentile or better. Willard Junior High School was a desegregated school, serving an area in the southern section of the city which ran from the top of the Berkeley Hills to the flatlands of the Bay. Burbank Junior High School in west Berkeley was almost completely Negro.

During the time that the report was being circulated and discussed, one of the teachers at Burbank, Marjorie Ramsey, had become interested in whether junior high schools really were valid educationally in today's society, and had gathered a lot of literature which raised doubts as to the wisdom of placing ninth graders under the same roof with seventh and eighth graders. It occurred to her that a separate ninth grade school would not only achieve the benefits that she saw in eliminating the ninth grade from the junior high schools, but also would solve the problem of de facto segregation in Berkeley's junior high schools. She came forward with a proposal--

soon known as the Ramsey Plan -- that Burbank become a ninth grade school for the whole city, Garfield become a seventh and eighth grade school for northeast and northwest Berkeley, and Willard become a seventh and eighth grade for the southeastern and southwestern half of the city. The Board directed the staff in early 1964 to study and report on the educational feasibility of this proposal. The staff report was submitted in May, 1964, and on May 19 the Board adopted the Ramsey Plan, at a meeting attended by over 2,000 people. At that meeting, before the Board's decision was made, a speaker representing a newly-formed organization called Parents Association for Neighborhood Schools, commonly known as PANS, informed the public at large and the Board that if the Ramsey Plan were adopted, the Board would be faced with a recall.*

The PANS organization was true to its word. A bitter recall campaign was on, energetically pushed by the local newspaper and quietly backed by the Mayor.

On the day after the decision to adopt the Ramsey Plan the Berkeley Gazette had this front page headline:

SCHOOL BOARD RESHUFFLES
3 JUNIOR HIGH BOUNDARIES

There was a front page editorial entitled "IT'S TIME FOR A SHOWDOWN WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD". Here are three paragraphs:

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* Recall is an innovation of the Western states, originally promoted in California, along with the initiative and the referendum, by progressives anxious to break the strangle-hold of certain major utilities on the State Legislature and local governments.

"The concern of the community--and our own concern--is to halt the flight from Berkeley of good citizens who are sick and tired of the namby-pamby decisions of the Board and to halt the flight, also, of students and teachers from Berkeley schools."

"This flight is not motivated by a fear of integration, or opposition to it; rather the flight arises from disgust with uncertainty, quibbling and the agitation of a "bleeding hearts" segment of our population which has grabbed control of the board of education, the school administration and the city council."

"The adoption of the Ramsey Plan for the junior high schools is the final straw."

For the next few weeks the front pages and the editorial columns of the Berkeley Gazette were full of agitation for recall of the Board. Recall petitions were circulated, and the requisite number of signatures was obtained by mid-summer. Politically, the Board was in trouble. Many of the University people were away, and they represented much of the Board's support. The lone newspaper was, to put it mildly, unfriendly.

The recall petitions falsely stated that the Board had made a decision to integrate not only the junior high schools but also the elementary schools. All of this was in very careful language which did not quite say so on literal reading but which certainly said so to the casual reader. The petitions suggested that with the start of school in September elementary children from kindergarten on up would be bused all around town. All this had to be overcome, and the thousands of dedicated supporters who had worked so hard in the many campaigns from 1959 to 1962 were well equipped to take the challenge. They organized as the Berkeley Friends of Better Schools, and in the period

of two months in which the recall petitions were being circulated, over 100 house meetings were held.

But more than this was needed. It would have been extremely difficult to win a special election held in the summer and publicized one-sidedly by an antagonistic newspaper. A delay was needed until after school started to get all of the troops back and to have more time to spread the truth around. More than anything else, the start of school without the busing of kindergarten and elementary children would be the most effective answer to the false charges of the recall group. Fortunately, the recall provisions of the Berkeley City Charter were ambiguous in certain important respects and had to be resolved by Court action. Litigation commenced by supporters of the Board delayed the election until October.

The election resulted in a better than 60% vote for the incumbent School Board members. In retrospect, it was a good thing that this happened, but it was real torture for all of those involved while it was going on. It was a good thing because it provided an opportunity for education of the community. It forced the community to decide in a clear-cut fashion whether or not it was really willing to do anything about the problem.

There were collateral effects as well. In 1963 the Berkeley City Council had passed a Fair Housing Ordinance, and the opponents, by a referendum petition, had placed the ordinance on the ballot in the regular municipal election of April, 1963. It was defeated by

52 to 48% vote of the citizens of Berkeley. In a basic and realistic sense this was the same issue that the city faced a year and a half later in the School Board recall, and by that time the vote was better than 60% the other way. The month after the recall, in November of 1964, California had on its state-wide ballot an initiative constitutional amendment called Proposition Fourteen, which wrote into the Constitution the right of citizens to discriminate in housing in any way that they wanted.* State-wide that carried by a 2-1 vote, but in Berkeley, in November of 1964, Proposition Fourteen lost by a 65-35% vote. There had been that much change in the community attitude on the matter, largely as a result of the confrontation resulting from the Board's studies and action and the recall election.

The change in community attitudes during the past few years was not limited to educational issues. For several decades the City Council, like the School Board, had been dominated by a conservative majority, the division being mostly 7-2 or 6-3. More or less contemporaneously with the change in the School Board, the balance in the Council also shifted. The liberals achieved a 5-4 majority in 1961 and raised this to 6-3 in 1965. As a result, the City government also has begun working on the problems peculiar to multi-racial communities. This has helped to create a broadly-based atmosphere of constructive concern and healthy hopefulness throughout the City

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* Proposition Fourteen was declared void, as violative of the Fourteenth Amendment, by the California Supreme Court in 1966 and by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967.

in relation to all of its problems, and has served to minimize tensions which, in the immediately adjacent cities, have at times generated violence.

The abortive recall election did not mark the end of the Board's concern with de facto segregation. When the Ramsey Plan for integration of the junior high schools was adopted in May, 1964, the Board made a deliberate decision to lay aside any consideration of desegregation in the elementary schools for at least two years. This was received with some unhappiness by those who viewed segregation as an even graver evil in the elementary grades than at the junior high level; and the recall proponents considered it an evasive and deceptive action intended to lull the community into inaction.

The Board's decision was based on a number of solid reasons: (1) The Ramsey Plan presented a formidable task. To bring about a major change in the administrative structure, enrollment, and curriculum of the junior high grades, through the efforts of administrators and teachers already burdened with the full-time tasks of day-to-day classroom responsibilities, and confronted with hostile comments, complaints, and queries by large segments of the community, was enough of a job. Until it was well accomplished, any study of elementary desegregation would threaten failure in both areas. (2) The Ramsey Plan had to be accomplished in conjunction with demonstrable improvement in the quality of the educational program. The familiar complaint that integration will dilute the quality of education offered to high achievers had to be met and answered with results too good to be effectively

challenged. (3) "Progress" had to retain some connection with the community's sense of responsibility. The reaction to the Ramsey Plan in actual operation would greatly affect the public's view as to what should be done at the elementary level.

Despite insistent pressure from both sides, the Board Members refused to commit either themselves personally or future Board policy in either direction, but wisely insisted that future decisions would have to be based on the relevant factors as they might exist when the decisions were made.

Notwithstanding a number of problems, some anticipated and some not, the Ramsey Plan was put into effect smoothly and has been viewed, after two years of operation, with enthusiasm and support by the vast majority of teachers, administrators, pupils and parents. The best indicator is the overwhelming vote of confidence reflected in the public's approval by a wide margin of a whopping $1.50 increase in the school tax rate in June, 1966, at a time when almost every other section of the state was turning down school tax increases amounting to a small fraction of this amount.

In many respects, the 1964 recall election marked the beginning of a new era in the Berkeley schools.

For one thing, all of the controversy over the "new" programs and policies of the preceding few years was crystallized and put to rest by the clear-cut defeat of the recall. The community experienced a catharsis of sorts and stopped looking back.

For another, an almost new Board of Education took over, as a result of a highly unusual wave of "promotions" of Board members to positions requiring them to resign their Board positions.* By April, 1965, only one of the five Board members who a year earlier had persuaded Dr. Neil Sullivan to become Superintendent of Schools was still on the Board. The new members have infused the Board with fresh blood. They do not point to battle scars or decorative ribbons but instead are eager to earn their own credentials.

Most important, a new school administration took over in 1964, concurrently with the recall campaign. The former superintendent, who had energetically tackled the problems of segregation, had announced in 1963 that he planned to resign in 1964 to pursue further graduate studies. An intensive nationwide scouting mission led the Board to Dr. Neil V. Sullivan, who agreed in March, 1964, to take over the superintendency in September. Realistically, he served as the Board's chief consultant and advisor on major policy and personnel matters after March, and the decision to adopt the Ramsey Plan had his deeply-committed approval. A major administrative reorganization resulted in an almost completely new central administrative staff for Superintendent Sullivan -- a staff which is worth the envy of any major school district in the country.

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* One of those vindicated in the October, 1964, recall election, Dr. Sherman J. Maisel, was appointed a Governor of the Federal Reserve Board by President Johnson a few months later.

The noteworthy events of the past two years range through many areas, including substantial salary increases for teachers, broadened educational programs, protection of classroom freedoms, and innovations in group teaching projects. For the purposes of this paper, the one area which requires special mention is that of desegregating the elementary schools.

In the 1966-67 school year, after two years of experience with the Ramsey Plan, the Board took up for careful study the question of de facto segregation of students in the kindergarten through sixth grade range. In May, 1967, after a number of staff presentations and public hearings, the Board made a firm commitment to desegregate the elementary schools of Berkeley by September, 1968. It set a timetable calling for the staff to report its analysis of various desegregation plans by October, 1967, and specifying final selection of a plan by the Board not later than February, 1968. The staff analysis was actually reported in September, and the Board is in the process -- now familiar to Berkeleyans -- of studying this analysis, publicly voicing its questions, concerns, and inclinations, and absorbing the public's reactions through correspondence and public hearings. When the time for decision arrives next February, the Board members will be thoroughly advised by the professional staff, they will have studied the various proposals carefully, and they will know what the community thinks. Their decision will be surrounded with all the safeguards for wise action that intelligence and dedication can provide. Hopefully, it will not generate another recall election.

If anything at all can be learned from Berkeley in relation to inter-racial problems of education, it is that the most meaningful approach is to force the community to come to grips with the problem. You don't have to be in a policy-making position to start this process. Somewhere along the line you have to reach and affect those in such positions, but you can't wait until the conditions are right; you cannot go on the basis that you shouldn't rock the boat too much, or that you should work on the fringe until you can get people to recognize what should be done, and then move. You cannot go on the basis, in other words, that the problems should be solved first before you try to solve them, because the involvement of the community in the identification of the problem and the search for the answer is itself a major ingredient of any workable solution.